



Aden launches operation against separatists

- 20 fighters of the Southern Transitional Council killed as Saudi-backed forces carry out airstrikes
- ‘South Yemen’ resurgence feared as separatists announce move towards ‘independent state’
- UAE says its forces have pulled out, seeks de-escalation
- Islamabad ‘ready to play its role’, continues to urge diplomatic solution to crisis

DUBAI/MUKALLA: The internationally recognised Saudi-backed government of Yemen on Friday launched an operation to oust the forces of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) — who have taken over large swaths of territory in recent weeks.

The offensive came as separatists based in the south of Yemen announced the start of a two-year transitional period towards declaring an independent state, reigniting fears that the country may be split in two again.

In a statement, Aden said it had instructed the governor of Yemen’s Hadramaut province to take control of ‘Homeland Shield’ forces, granting him full military, security and administrative authority in what it said was a move to restore security and order.

In an address on *Yemen TV*, Governor Salem Ahmed Saeed al-Khunbashi said the operation was to be peaceful and was not a declaration of war. He said it was meant to prevent the use of camps to threaten security and to protect Hadramaut from sliding into chaos.

He later said his forces had taken control of a military camp in al-Khasha’a, the largest and most important base in the province.

The oil-producing Hadramaut province borders Saudi Arabia and many prominent Saudis trace their origins to it, lending it cultural and historical significance for the kingdom.

STC forces grabbed much of resource-rich Hadramaut and neighbouring Mahra province on the Omani frontier, in a largely unopposed advance last month.

Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Yemen blamed STC leader Aidarus Al-Zubaidi for refusing to grant landing permission the previous day for a plane carrying a Saudi delegation to Aden.

“For several weeks and until yesterday, the Kingdom sought to make all efforts with the Southern Transitional Council to end the escalation ... but it faced continuous rejection and stubbornness from Aidarus Al-Zubaidi,” the Saudi ambassador, Mohammed Al-Jaber, said on X.

Zubaidi issued directives to close air traffic at Aden’s airport on Thursday, the ambassador added, saying that a plane carrying a Saudi delegation to Aden aiming to find solutions to the crisis was denied permission to land.

A halt in flights at Aden international airport on Thursday continued into Friday as both sides traded blame as to who was responsible for the air traffic shutdown.

According to the Flightradar24 tracking website, no planes have taken off or landed at Aden airport for more than 24 hours, although the ministry did not officially announce its closure.

Airstrikes

The announcement of the operation was followed by airstrikes on key STC positions. At least 20 fighters were reportedly killed and 20 wounded in airstrikes on the airport and military bases in Hadramaut’s Seiyun city.

Saudi sources confirmed the air

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LAHORE: A cyclist passes in front of a grocer’s as dense fog blankets the city. A cold spell has gripped the provincial capital, with the mercury dropping to a minimum of 7 degrees Celsius.—AFP

Journalists, YouTubers get life terms for ‘digital terror’

- Adil Raja, Wajahat S. Khan, Sabir Shakir, Shaheen Sehba, Moeed Pirzada, Haider Mehdi and Akbar Hussain sentenced by ATC
- Each man tried ‘in absentia’; given two life sentences each; charged with ‘waging war against state’ and ‘incitement’ related to May 9 riots

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: An Islamabad anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Friday handed down two life sentences each to over half a dozen journalists and YouTubers in cases related to the May 9, 2023, riots.

The unrest, which saw government and military installations vandalised, erupted following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan.

The prosecution accused the convicted individuals of engaging in “digital terrorism against state institutions” in relation to the events on May 9, 2023.

The cases stemmed from allegations that the accused used online platforms to incite, facilitate and amplify attacks against state institutions during the May 9 unrest.

Former army officer Adil Raja; YouTuber Haider Raza Mehdi; journalists Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir and Shaheen

Sehba; analyst Moeed Pirzada; and, former army official Akbar Hussain were sentenced by the ATC on Friday.

In absentia

Verdicts, earlier reserved, were announced by ATC Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra after the completion of trials conducted in absentia — at the prosecution’s request and by means of invoking the relevant provisions of anti-terrorism laws.

According to court orders issued by Judge Sipra — seen by *Dawn* — the cases against Adil Raja, Wajahat Saeed Khan, Shaheen Sehba and Haider Raza Mehdi were registered at Islamabad’s Ramna police station.

Meanwhile, cases against Sabir Shakir, Akbar Hussain and Moeed Pirzada were registered at the federal capital’s Aabpara police station.

The court sentenced the men to rigorous life imprisonment on two counts: waging or attempting to wage war against Pakistan, and

criminal conspiracy.

They were also fined Rs500,000 for each of the two offences.

They were also sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs200,000 under Section 121-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

The PPC provision deals with the subject of conspiracy to commit offences that are punishable under Section 121 (waging or attempting to wage war against Pakistan).

Moreover, the court imposed another 10-year rigorous imprisonment term and a Rs200,000 fine for committing an offence under Section 131 of the PPC (abetting mutiny or attempting to seduce a soldier, sailor or airman from their duty).

They were also awarded triple five-year rigorous imprisonment sentences on three counts under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, along with fines of Rs200,000 for

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Auction of 600MHz spectrum next month: IT minister

New spectrum sale to boost 3G and 4G, enable 5G rollout

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The government would auction an additional 600 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum next month, Federal Minister for IT and Telecom Shaza Fatima Khawaja said on Friday, stressing that the move would pave the way for improved internet speeds and the rollout of 5G services.

Addressing a news conference, Ms Khawaja said the federal cabinet had approved the framework for the auction, covering seven spectrum bands, five of which

would be offered in Pakistan for the first time.

“The information memorandum highlighting the details of the auction will be released in the coming days,” she said. “The 5G services are expected to be launched within six months in provincial capitals and Islamabad.”

She said the additional spectrum would also significantly improve 3G and 4G services within three to four months of the auction.

The radio spectrum is a finite national resource that consists of electromagnetic frequencies used to carry wireless signals for mobile calls, mobile internet, television, satellite communications and emergency services.

In mobile networks, wider and more efficient spectrum availa-

bility allows telecom operators to carry more data at faster speeds and with lower congestion, particularly as smartphone use and video streaming rise.

Because spectrum is limited and cannot be created artificially, governments regulate its use and allocate it through auctions to ensure transparency, competition and optimal utilisation.

Stressing that internet connectivity was a “growth engine” for several sectors of the economy, the minister said the country faced speed and quality issues due to an acute shortage of available spectrum. She said Pakistan had about 274MHz of spectrum, among the lowest levels in the region, and noted that Bangladesh

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Cervical cancer vaccine now part of Sindh’s programme

- Becomes available free of charge for nine-year-old girls at EPI centres
- Other provinces expected to follow suit

By Faiza Ilyas

KARACHI: In an effort to protect young girls from cervical cancer, the Sindh Health Department, in line with a decision by the Federal Directorate of Immunisation, has included the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine in the province’s routine immunisation programme.

Other provinces are also expected to roll out similar initiatives in the coming months.

According to a notification issued by the Sindh Health Department, the decision has become effective from Jan 1 this year.

“The vaccination shall target girls aged nine years with an intended minimum coverage of 70 per cent,” the notification stated.

The department has directed all district health officers to adopt a mixed delivery approach, including facility-based vaccination, community outreach, and school-based vaccination activities, to ensure optimal coverage, equitable access, and sustainability.

“To ensure accurate monitoring, accountability, and transparency, HPV vaccination through routine immunisation must be fully integrated into the existing EPI [Expanded Programme on Immunisation] recording and reporting mechanisms,” the notification added.

Provincial government health officials have also been instructed to ensure preparedness, including micro-planning, staff orientation, logistics, and chain management, and

coordination with relevant stakeholders to support an effective rollout of the HPV vaccine under routine immunisation.

‘Free of charge’

According to officials, the vaccine will be available free of charge for nine-year-old girls at EPI centres, outreach vaccination sites, and during school-based vaccination sessions.

It may be recalled that the Sindh government launched a province-wide HPV vaccination campaign — the first-ever immunisation initiative against cervical cancer — on Sept 15, 2025, targeting 4.1 million girls aged nine to 15 years.

Despite official claims of over 65pc coverage

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Muslim bloc alarmed by deteriorating Gaza situation

- Pakistan, seven Muslim-majority states stress need for urgent ‘early recovery’
- Joint statement warns crisis worsening as winter, storms batter displaced camps
- Calls for unhindered aid access, shelters for Gaza families

Dawn Report

KARACHI: Eight Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan, on Friday expressed concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, saying that severe winter weather had further worsened conditions and stressing the need to immediately initiate and scale up early recovery efforts.

In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Qatar, Indonesia, Jordan, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) expressed their “deep-seated concern” at the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

These countries had also worked with US President Donald Trump’s administration last year on a plan to end



GAZA: Women mourn during the funeral of those who died after a fire broke out inside tents for displaced Palestinians.—AFP

Israel’s genocide and invasion in Gaza. A fragile ceasefire has been in place in Gaza

since October as a result of the effort, with Israel violating the truce multiple times by

carrying out attacks in the Gaza Strip.

Last month, the UN International Organisation for Migration had said that hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians were facing flooding of their tents and shelters due to heavy rains, and materials for shelters and sandbags were not being allowed to enter the enclave.

Much of Gaza’s infrastructure has also been destroyed because of the war, and Palestinians are facing grim living conditions.

In their joint statement on Friday, the eight Muslim-majority nations highlighted that severe, harsh and unstable weather conditions, including heavy rainfall and storms, had exacerbated the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The situation had been further “compounded by the continued lack of sufficient humanitarian access, acute shortages of essential life-saving supplies and the slow pace of the entry of essential materials required for the rehabilitation of basic services and the establishment of temporary housing”, the statement said.

It added that the “severe weather has laid bare the fragility of existing humanitarian conditions, particularly for almost 1.9 million people, and displaced families living in inadequate shelters”.

“Flooded camps, damaged tents, the collapse of damaged buildings and exposure to cold temperatures, coupled with malnutrition, have significantly heightened risks to civilian lives, including due to disease outbreaks, especially

among children, women, the elderly and individuals with medical vulnerabilities,” it said.

The foreign ministers also lauded the “tireless efforts” of United Nations organisations, particularly the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), and other humanitarian international NGOs, in continuing to assist Palestinian civilians and deliver humanitarian assistance under extremely difficult and complex circumstances.

They demanded that Israel ensure the UN and international NGOs can operate in Gaza and the West Bank in a sustained, predictable and unrestricted manner, given their integral role in the humanitarian response in the

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No ‘minus Imran’ condition set for talks: PM’s aide

Dawn Report

KARACHI: With a political impasse persisting, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah said on Friday that the premier had not imposed any “minus Imran” condition for political engagement.

Speaking to *Geo News*, Mr Sanaullah said the government neither sought to sideline anyone nor considered such an approach politically viable.

Helpful suggestions: Editorial on Page 6

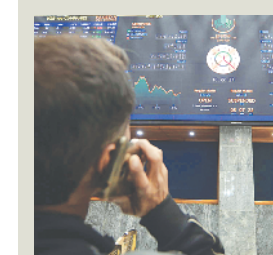
“Prime Minister Shehbaz has not set any condition for minus Imran Khan,” he said. “We neither seek to minus anyone nor consider it politically viable. Similar efforts were made to sideline us in the past,” he added.

A day earlier, Mr Sanaullah had suggested that “confidence-building measures” between the leadership of the PML-N, the PTI and the PPP could help reduce political tensions.

He said the prime minister, as leader of the House, had offered negotiations to the opposition, adding that dialogue was central to parliamentary democracy. He urged the PTI to “take a step forward”, saying the prime minister had invited the opposition to meet in

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ON OTHER PAGES



PSX marks another milestone

The Pakistan Stock Exchange extended its remarkable rally into the final session of the week, as aggressive buying by investors, spurred by rising economic optimism, propelled the KSE-100 index to a historic close near the 179,500-point threshold on Friday. The index finished at 179,034.93 points, up 2,679.44 points, or 1.52 per cent. **Page 9**



Tehran fumes after Trump threat

After President Donald Trump said the US was ‘locked and loaded’ to respond if Iran’s security forces killed protesters, Tehran warned that any intervention would destabilise the region and destroy America’s interest. Telling Washington to be mindful of its soldiers’ safety, Iran said it would resolve challenges through dialogue, and not permit any form of foreign interference. **Page 12**

